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Bridgeport Board of Education  
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To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in reference to the upcoming bill, H.B. 5551, An Act Concerning The Commissioner's Network Of Schools. It is my understanding that this bill would enable the State Board of Education to take over individual schools in a district, effectively removing the control of the elected board of education, suspend state statutes, and eliminate the role of school governance councils.

It is also my understanding that the State Board of Education is an appointed board, answerable to the Governor alone. Boards of Education in cities, like Bridgeport, are elected., answering to our residents. This bill would seem to be a way for the Governor to circumvent an elected board, and the residents of our communities, in favor of his own appointed board.

It would appear that this bill removes any time limit on Commissioner's Network Schools. It removes the cap on how many Commissioner's Network schools can be taken over by the state. It removes the right of the local community to appoint their own turnaround committee. It eliminates the requirement that local parents, through their school governance council are included in the process. All of these would seem counterproductive to the local governance of our schools.

It is widely known that Connecticut's track record on taking over schools is anything but stellar. In fact, one of the first Commissioner's Network schools handed over to Jumoke/FUSE failed miserably under the administration of the Commissioner and State Board of Education. The charter network admitted it was "winging it," hiring ex-convicts, mismanaging funds and allowing student test scores to drop precipitously. Even the current principal, Karen Lott, admitted that the takeover was a failure, with only 13% of Milner's students scoring proficient in Language Arts and a shocking 7% in Math. Lott declared that what the school needed was experienced staff, additional resources, and community support, particularly wrap-around social services.

The State Board of Education is not going to make this better. We in Bridgeport have had front row seats to the discriminatory practices of the charter school consortium. We do not need more of this; not now, not ever.

On its face, this bill appears to be a virtual carbon copy of ConnCAN's proposal for the Commissioner's Network schools. It is widely understood that ConnCAN is nothing more than a shell for the "school reform" charter school movement. Enacting this bill would be a clear conflict of interest. State takeovers have been characterized by the conversion of public schools into charter schools; schools unaccountable to elected boards, with little duty to report on its

finances, yet who receive millions in public funds. Charters also tend to exclude a district's neediest children, without any accountability for these practices.

Communities of need like Bridgeport know what our children need. Our teachers and principals and all the dedicated staff in our schools know, too. In fact, since early February our Interim Superintendent, among many others, have been testifying, along with real national experts, in front of Judge Moukawsher in the CCJEF case about what our schools need to improve: smaller classes, more teachers, social workers, pre-k, wraparound services for kids and families, adequate facilities and more. We also know that we don't need the appointed Connecticut State Board of Education coming in here and turning our schools over to the carpetbaggers in the "school reform" consortium.

The legislature can truly impact student performance by settling the CCJEF case and enacting real finance reform to fund Connecticut schools adequately. What the legislature should NOT do is replicate failures of the past. That is what H.B. 5551 would do. Governor Malloy and his administration are apparently doing the bidding of ConnCAN and the rest of the charter industry. It is the legislature's duty to act on behalf of the children in this state on behalf of taxpayers, and on behalf of democracy.

Connecticut needs elected officials with integrity and clarity of vision to once and for all, to examine the evidence and protect the interests, not of high-priced lobbyists, but of those children most in need of protection. Please, reject this bill. We are counting on you to be the voice of the 22,000 children of Bridgeport and the thousands of other children who will lose their rights under this bill.

Most sincerely,

Ben Walker

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Ben M. Walker

Secretary

Bridgeport Board of Education